


Towards a Symbiotic Coexistence of Comparative Literature and World Literature

Jüri Talvet
University of Tartu

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Jüri Talvet,

"Towards a Symbiotic Coexistence of Comparative Literature and World Literature"

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Special Issue **World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century**. Ed. Marko Juvan

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Abstract: In his article "Towards a Symbiotic Coexistence of Comparative Literature and World Literature" Jüri Talvet postulates that comparative literature has really never enjoyed a pivotal or central status in the broad field of literary studies, yet at the same time specialized studies of separate literary traditions have not been able to fill numerous gaps in the understanding of literary creation as a broader cultural phenomenon influencing (although often invisibly) the world-view and axiological attitudes of entire societies and vast communities of people. Developing some ideas presented in his book *A Call for Cultural Symbiosis* (2005) and in his article "Edaphos and Episteme of Comparative Literature," *Interlitteraria* (2005), as well as the ideas of Juri M. Lotman, Talvet proposes a symbiotic approach aimed at reconciling extreme oppositions and establishing a dialogue that would strengthen the position of the discipline of comparative literature, as well as the field of world literatures.

Jüri TALVET

Towards a Symbiotic Coexistence of Comparative Literature and World Literature

Comparative literature and world literature are concepts with solid histories going back to the nineteenth century. The idea of *Weltliteratur* begins with Johann Wolfgang Goethe in 1827 and, at the start of the third millennium, is enjoying a renaissance with a new pragmatic approach to the canons of world literature emerging (mostly) in US-American scholarship (see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; D'haen, Domínguez, Thomsen; Đurišin, *Čo je svetová literatúra*; Lawall; Pizer; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee). On the other hand, in Western countries the "death" of the discipline of comparative literature has been declared repeatedly (see, e.g., Bassnett; Li; Spivak). Even so, the ICLA/AILC: International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée remains one of the largest world organizations uniting scholars of literature. In some Asian countries, notably in China, comparative literature is instead of declining gathering new energy pedagogically and institutionally (see, e.g., Li; Wang and Liu). Also in Central and East European scholarship comparative literature has thrived prior to the demise of the Soviet empire and remains an important discipline since (see, e.g., Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek).

In the article at hand, my intention is not to revise the histories of comparative literature and world literature, but to reflect on the current situation of both institutionally and with regard to their intellectual trajectories and practice. Although a formal signifier should hardly influence the content of the field, it is certain that in reality it does even to a greater extent than one might suppose. I started teaching Western literary history at Tartu University in the mid-1970s. During the larger part of the period the field, present at nearly all universities of the former Soviet Union, was called *зарубежная литература* (foreign literature): it literally meant all literatures produced outside the borders of the Soviet Union, while literature created in Russian and other numerous languages of the Soviet Union were not included in the concept. In practice, the curriculum — in broad lines, a uniform course established by programs prepared and confirmed in Moscow — included predominantly the canon of Western literature, with some additions of Eastern European literatures. Classical Greek and Roman literature was taught apart from foreign literature, while Oriental literatures were taught only at few universities or institutes of major centres like Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg). Russian literature was taught extensively as a special phenomenon. Thus Juri M. Lotman, for example, taught Russian literature for most of his life in Tartu. At the same time Estonian literature was taught separately in detail only to students of Estonian philology.

As to the canon of Western literature taught to all students of philology (not depending on their speciality) at Soviet universities, it included all major authors and their work from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. As for the twentieth-century literatures, there were substantial omissions because a number of Western writers, generally labelled as "modernists," were declared "decadent." Even if a short characterization of their work was provided, it had to be in accord with the reigning Marxist point of view thus emphasizing negative features of modernism. In fact, students could not really read their work because the translations into the languages of the Soviet Union were subject to severe restrictions and censorship (see Eglāja-Kristsone). As it stands, the processes of the reception of Western literature in the Soviet Union (and in its satellite countries, too) remain an as of yet unexplored area of study and to draw any far-reaching conclusions on the basis of only one or two language areas of the Soviet Union would be misleading. Suffice to mention a few examples from the Estonian experience. Thus until the second year of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, a major volume assembling Kafka's three novels could not be published in Estonia, but surprisingly enough, a book of Kafka's short stories appeared in translation in 1962, while Kafka's grimmest novel *Der Prozess* (including the essay "Kafka" by Roger Garaudy) was published in 1966. The first two collections of Jorge Luis Borges's intellectual-fantastical stories were translated into Estonian already in 1972 and 1976, when the Argentine writer's work had not yet been translated into Russian. This situation contrasts with the general opinion that all Western literature translated into other languages of the Soviet Union had to be preceded by translations into Russian (see Eglāja-Kristsone).

Towards the end of the 1980s under increasingly liberal conditions, Tartu University's Department of Foreign Literature — in Russian *зарубежная литература* and in Estonian *väliskirjandus* — was

replaced with *maailmakirjandus* (world literature). The aim of the shift was to abolish restrictive borders which kept literatures created by the nations of the Soviet Union apart from the rest of world literature. Naturally, as the teaching personnel was limited to only a few lecturers, in reality instructors continued to teach courses on major phenomena and authors of Western literature. When Estonia's political independence as a state was re-established at the start of the 1990s and international contacts with Western countries all of the sudden became intense both in scholarship and institutionally, the term *võrdlev kirjandusteadus* (comparative literature) came to be as the closest international term applicable to scholars in Estonia. Such a designation and branding corresponded to the main direction of activity in literary research: in 1994 the Eesti Võrdleva Kirjandusteaduse Assotsiatsioon (Estonian Association of Comparative Literature) was founded and became an institutional member of the ICLA/AILC. Estonian scholars started to take part in the activities lead by the ICLA/AILC, while at the same time changes in curricula were introduced with regard to the canon of Western literature. There was an attempt to shift the emphasis on literature as an "intercultural" phenomenon following Lotman's and Dionýz Ďurišin's thought (see, e.g., Talvet, *A Call*). The same principle was introduced in writing new high school and university textbooks which were not organized according to the national-linguistic principle (which presents separate overviews of English, French, German, Spanish, and other literatures) as had been the overwhelming practice in the study and teaching of "foreign literature" in the Soviet Union. Instead, there were chapters on European Renaissance and Baroque poetry, the Enlightenment and the Romantic novel with its different subspecies, symbolist and early modernist poetry, the extensive phenomenon of naturalist and realist prose fiction, the great modernist break-through and experiment starting from World War I, etc., and thus in principle a "thematic" and "historical" approach was adopted. The distinctive feature was that all these phenomena came to be viewed and characterized comparatively transcending national-linguistic borders.

Thus it can be argued that in Estonian pedagogy and scholarship a kind of hybridization of comparative literature and world literature was developed whereby general comparative literature and world literature courses of the Western literary historical canon are taught. It is not an exaggeration to say that these courses, because of literature's multifunctional core role in the societal and moral self-conscience of all communities, include the teaching of Western cultural history, thus very much a "contextual" approach practiced elsewhere (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári who present a history of the contextual approach in place since the 1980s in German, Canadian, Israeli, etc. scholarship). We were and are aware that we cannot teach everything and that we are not able to go into minute analytical details in overview courses. However, we make an effort to complement these courses by seminars on more specialized phenomena, in which the comparative principle is followed as much as possible. Study programs at Tartu University are far from perfect. Yet over the recent years, courses of comparative literature and world literature are not only attended by students for whom such are compulsory, but also by students whose specialities are philosophy, semiotics, history, psychology, or even some hard sciences such as biology or physics. These young people feel a need to supplement their speciality with cultural knowledge that they cannot obtain in their main fields.

Over recent years, the general trend at Western universities has been to develop interdisciplinary studies, which in reality means making the humanities look more science-like and to saturate them with elements of technological sciences. The tendency has reached a point of exhaustion because a great part of it has been formed artificially, against the nature of different fields, and not taking into account the ethical role the humanities play in society. I posit that with the said approach we fail to argue that it would be especially the engineers, physicians, pharmacologists, computer scientists, and so on, who would be in need of thought available in literature and in culture in general. In my opinion, departments of comparative and world literature ought to be core units of the university curriculum especially on the undergraduate levels: the benefits of such a core curriculum would assist students in the developing of ethics, a matter of great relevance today.

However, in a more minute context, the terminologies and taxonomies of comparative literature and world literature remain a problem. English "comparative" has its closest equivalent in Russian where the corresponding term is *сравнительный* (comparative), the German *vergleichende* has a slightly different nuance, but the adjective applies to a subject that has set out to compare objects. English-language culture has until recently refused to acknowledge literary research as a "scientific"

activity. As the subject's complement is missing, "comparative literature" sounds in English liberal and "unscientific." It is not clear what is meant by "literature": does it belong to the researched object or the researching subject? Or both at the same time? Germans and Russians have eliminated this ambiguity by introducing the word "science" or "research," thus *vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* and *сравнительное литературоведение*. On the other hand, Romance languages have moved the emphasis of the notion comparative literature to the object: *littérature comparée*, *literatura comparada*, and *letteratura comparata* in French, Spanish, and Italian respectively. The object of study is thus clearly defined as literature which is compared or treated comparatively. Thus the field is implicitly contrasted with other types of literary research in which the object can be treated in isolation from other objects.

Maybe in the past the problems of terminology and taxonomy were less visible. However, in view of the strong present-day trend to make the humanities look like the sciences, the signifier of comparative literature and world literature may easily fail to make explicit the research field's identity. If the accent is moved to science, as in German and Russian, then one may ask how such science can be differentiated from any other theoretical discourse applied to literature. One can without any problems apply the term "comparative" to other fields: why not "comparative semiotics," "comparative translation studies," "comparative philosophy," "comparative psychology," "comparative narratology," "comparative epistemology," and so on? Indeed, the label "comparative" has been already introduced in some fields of university science, like "comparative political sciences" or "comparative economics," and maybe others. Thus "comparative" retains a certain attractiveness as an academic term. The problem in the field of researching literature is that "comparative literary science" is rivalled institutionally by "(general) literary theory." As theory is an inalienable part of most hard sciences, one may ask if "comparative literary science" cannot be regarded just as a part of theory of literature. Defined as a kind of science, does it need autonomy at all? Indeed, at a number of European universities (for instance at several universities in Spain) theory of literature and comparative literature form a joint unit, department, or institute (see, e.g., Villanueva <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1915>>). Within these units, theory of literature outweighs comparative literature, although some more fashionable aspects of comparative literature — for example literature's relations with the other arts — are present sporadically, but the fundamental task of comparative literature to teach and research literary phenomena in the transnational and trans-linguistic context of world literatures has generally been neglected.

The application of a signifier with an emphasis on the field or *edaphos* (ground, soil) as applied in Romance languages would provide a solution to the above-mentioned dilemmas. If a university department is called "French Literature" or "Estonian Literature," it is obvious to anyone that in these departments French and Estonian literature is taught and researched. Yet the attribute "compared" — which indeed cannot be applied to all languages beyond the Romanic area with equal facility — is ambiguous. Thus I postulate that the research and study of a national literature should apply a comparative approach and in the recent years, apparently under the influence of comparative literature scholarship, more comparative elements have been introduced in the research and teaching of national literatures. There are in the U.S. and elsewhere "departments of literature," a general designation in which in addition to the study of literary texts proper literary history and theory are combined. Such a structural unit is all a university in whatever parts of the world needs: an academic center providing a possibility to research literature in its widest possible contexts and at the same time to grant a detailed treatment of literary phenomena as substantial factors of national culture in its linguistic, social, and other dimensions. However, the said proposition is at times undermined. For example, Stockholm University's "Department of Literature" has been renamed "Department of Literature and History of Ideas," which appears redundant to me. It is an example of a general trend at Western universities to weaken the position of humanities by introducing elements of fragmentation. As I suggest above, behind the noble-looking directive of "inter-disciplinary" research, there is a transparent strategy to undermine the autonomy of the study of literature and to turn it into a kind of a beggarly appendix of "real" or "hard" sciences.

The designation "literature and history of ideas" could well be expanded and if one takes that route, then why not "department of literature and history of sensibility, passion, and love"? Does anybody seriously think that great world literature has less to do with passions and love than with

reasoning and ideas? The greatness of literature as a species of artistic creation is in its multi-layered essence, it is the climax of a symbiotic creation in arts. It is at the same time philosophy, psychology, history, anthropology, sociology, aesthetics, ethics, linguistics, and so on. It is itself thoroughly interdisciplinary, unless we narrow its perspectives intentionally and reduce its significance by imposing on it either formally or sociologically biased research and teaching. In its integral effect, literature has an enormous capacity to influence the conscience of entire societies: it works by means of sensual images, thus being capable of entering both our daily and nightly consciousness. The public media of our days, manipulated by economic and political strategies is engaged in tremendous efforts of driving literature away from the social arena, because great literature, by its socially and ethically critical attitudes, appears as a danger to business driven in the entire world overwhelmingly by the ideology of profit and patriarchal values.

Literary scholarship and criticism of literature have their main task and responsibility in explicating literature as a historical and social phenomenon. The central position in this activity of both comparative literature and world literature is defined by their object that cannot be isolated or focused narrowly. Although "comparative literature" as a notion was not mentioned by Goethe, *Weltliteratur* could only emerge from the essential philosophic relatedness of self and other, "own" and "alien," a spiritual openness to the world of creation in its totality. In contrast to David Damrosch's definition and function of "world literature" (e.g., *What Is It* 5), I postulate that while world literature has often been related to establishing a canon of authors and works of world literatures, comparative literature on the other hand should have its key role in keeping the canon in a state of a permanent openness and discussion and based in in-depth scholarship and (re)interpretation. It would be mistaken to try to establish a canon of world literatures for all times and to determine which works belong to it and which are fated to remain in the remote obscurity of a national literature. It is clear that all national practices of teaching world literature depend on the accessibility of literary texts in translation, on the quality of translation, on the language knowledge of the students and scholars. Hence I believe that scholars and students of comparative literature and world literatures — while as said translation is necessary, relevant, and a must — need to acquire at least the reading knowledge of several languages not limited to one's own native language, even if the latter happens to be some English, French, or Spanish.

As said, comparative literature is interdisciplinary and comparisons between works in different fields of arts sharing motives, philosophy, creative principles, and so on ought to remain a guiding principle of both the discipline of comparative literature and the field of world literatures. However, the main objective of both should remain to be the study of literature as a point of departure: literature is a vast field including all possible inter-literary, as well as intra-literary and intra-cultural processes. I repeat that comparative literature means first and foremost the reading and study of literary works and phenomena in contexts transcending (but in no case abandoning) a determined national-linguistic area of culture. I would especially emphasize the responsibility of comparative literature scholars with regard to the research of reception of world literatures, that is, literary texts' existing active and passive canons, as well as the potential canon. It is obvious that such scholarship cannot be carried out by scholars who define themselves exclusively as specialists of a national literature (either coinciding or not with their own national-linguistic belonging). The comparatist should be well informed of broad intercultural processes, on the one hand and culture and literature of a certain national-linguistic area on the other.

The history of translation forms a special chapter in reception processes (i.e., intercultural transmission). There, even more specific linguistic preparation may be needed. For successfully coping with these tasks, national, comparative, and world literature scholars should unite their capacities and energies. In its diachronic perspective, comparative literature would hardly be possible to conceive of and achieve a perfect literary history because single scholars or international team of scholars can understand sufficiently the needs of every culture involved. At their best, collectively written literary histories are compilations of fragments of national literary histories. Further, in order to grasp literature's varied narratives combining "extra-histories" with "intra-histories," a comparative literature scholar should have a special sensibility about the blurring of distinctions between literature as original or primary creation and meta-literature as meditation on and the mediation of literature. It is no wonder that at the apex of one of Europe's greatest creative "explosions" in literature and at the same

time of the emergence of world literature, the most productive thinkers on literary creation were writers themselves. If deprived of sensibility, literary scholarship can easily start to ignore or undervalue important core segments of literary creation like poetry and especially lyrical poetry. Naturally, all literary history bears footprints of its own time. However, to turn the predominant perceptual aesthetic attitudes of one's own time or one's own ideology into an exclusive platform of a literary history would obviously lead to a great distortion of reality.

Who does establish the canon of world literature? I am far from admitting the claim of Roland Barthes and others about the omnipotence of critics and scholars, but it is true that the most capable thinkers about literature in a thorough dialogue with the work of talented writers are probably those who have established literary canons historically. Some have been able to re-establish into the canon works apparently fated to oblivion by ideological or aesthetical perspectives. For example, as Johann Gottfried Herder did in a dialogue with European folk poetry. In newer times, it is generally acknowledged that F.R. Leavis's critical work was substantial in reviving the figure of Jane Austen to her present-day glories. It is also a well known fact that the Spanish "generación del '27" headed by Federico García Lorca redeemed the poetic work of Luis de Góngora from a general negligence it had suffered in the preceding centuries. The critical effort is complemented by the hard toil of translators acting in a great variety of cultural spaces. Today, the "visual turn" and new media play an important role which alter many established practices including reading (see, e.g., Lehtonen <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2240>>; Vandermeersche and Soetaert <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1915>>). Also and more than often, exterior factors (like literary prizes, some occasional life happening) may enhance a writer's chance (especially in his/her lifetime) to be gradually consecrated in either the passive or the active canon of world literature (see, e.g., Dagnino <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/7>>). In all this, writers working in major internationally spread languages have great advantages over writers who — because of language barriers — are more than often fated to occupy only one locus in the second category of canons, those of national literatures.

What do I mean by the active canon of world literature? The writers belonging to the active canon of world literature are those whose work, despite some temporary halts, has become a more or less permanent object of an international discussion. Not only critics and scholars of a particular national culture discuss it, but the discourse about their work transcends the national-linguistic cultural space, as well as the circles of specialized readers and scholars. Their work has been widely translated so that access to is granted to the widest possible international reading public. Among the authors whose place in this canon has been firmly consecrated at least since the epoch of Romanticism, when German Romantic writers, thinkers, and translators — e.g., Herder, the Schlegels, Tieck — shaped the first outlines of a Western literary canon, it is Shakespeare, Goethe, Molière, Boccaccio, and Cervantes whose work remain in the forefront. A lot depends on the genre in which a writer's major work has been created. My impression is that Boccaccio's *Decameron* is by far more widely known and discussed in comparative literature or world literature than Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* or Petrarch's *Il canzoniere* and this is the case because prose fiction can much more easily be transferred from one linguistic-national space to other than poetical works. Among writers who temporarily may have fallen out from the world literature canon, I would mention great Spanish writers of the Baroque era like Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, or Francisco de Quevedo. They were well known to Goethe, the Schlegel brothers, and other writers in Romanticism who established the canon of Western literature in its basic contours that persist today. In French, Molière's *Don Juan* has overshadowed the original (and by no means inferior) Spanish Don Juan created in the play *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* by Tirso de Molina. Molière wrote his *Don Juan* in prose, while Tirso de Molina's play was created (as Spanish Golden Age drama in general) in a variety of metrical forms all employing end rhymes. And even if the work of Calderón has roused some sporadic interest in English and French scholarship, it has not attracted a wider theater public to incite discussion beyond the circle of specialized scholars or *hispanistas*. Lord Byron knew well the work of Francisco de Quevedo, but I doubt if an average British writer of our days has ever heard about the Spanish master of poetry and vast satirical work in prose and verse.

As Anglo-America and France have been in the vanguard of consecrating world literature authors during the twentieth century, little knowledge of the above-mentioned Spanish writers, along with

others, has spread to the eastern part of the world. Shakespeare, Goethe, and Ibsen have all had great contemporary success in China, Japan, and Korea (see Tam; Yip) whereas Spanish literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is still almost undiscovered in the East. Nonetheless, my conviction is that in a longer lapse of time and by some happy coincidence or a change in reception, great works of world literature of the past may be re-activated in the canon, for example with the help of new translations, especially by writers and poets. To make this possible a new and more flexible translation poetics is needed.

The "passive" canon of world literature is comprised of those works which — judging by world literature encyclopedias and anthologies — have been propagated by insiders from their culture of origin, which means that they are, really, discussed by international scholarship rarely. If they are included, it is because scholarly articles have been written or suggested by experts in their respective national literatures, but not by comparatists. On the other hand, comparative literature still lacks scholars who possess expert knowledge in lesser spoken languages and peripheral or minor literatures. Therefore, opinions about "peripheral" literatures as formulated by some comparatists from the "central" areas appear to be a superficial proposition (see Virk). As an example of a major work belonging to the passive canon of world literature I would mention the epic *Kalevipoeg* (1861) by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald. On the whole, one is likely to find a short article about Kreutzwald or his epic in the majority of multi-volume world literature encyclopedias and dictionaries. For example, there is an article about Kreutzwald in Volume 5 of the *Der Literatur Brockhaus*, while the three-volume *Kleines literarisches Lexikon*, even if failing to appreciate duly Kreutzwald as a poet and author, at least mentions briefly *Kalevipoeg* in its Volume 1 (from the beginning to the nineteenth century). Consecrated in Estonian as our "national epic," Kreutzwald's masterpiece has by today been translated in its full form into thirteen languages, the latest being a second translation in English (2011) and a translation in Hindi (2012). Still, it is obvious that the epic has not yet become an object of international discussion. Its inclusion in the active world literature canon has been inhibited in Estonian scholarship which until recently has viewed the epic from an exclusive inside of Estonia, scarcely informed of a wider world and European context of epic poetry. Instead, a folklore centered approach to *Kalevipoeg* has prevailed preventing the work's treatment as a European masterpiece in the genre of lyrical epics, in many ways comparable to Goethe's *Faust*.

What I would call the potential canon of world literatures emerges from much broader scope: most writers who do not write for a mass audience and are not willing to adapt to fashionable (and profitable) topics, strive to be visible outside their own national-linguistic area. This goal is particularly difficult to achieve for those who create their work in the great majority of languages other than the so-called world languages of the West, which besides being spoken by extended communities are also taught at schools and universities around the world. Although Chinese, Russian, Arabic, and many other languages belonging to the global East are spoken by billions of people, in international cultural communication they still have a relatively modest role. Translation process which ideally should facilitate access to the works of writers working in languages other than English, French, German, Spanish, (and maybe) Portuguese and Italian, is often biased and favored by merely commercial factors. The greatest injustice in the field of world literature is done to poets. It is especially hard to translate poetic works and it is by no means easier to find publishers for poetry, especially translated ones. Poetry translation, by far more than prose transfer, includes all kinds of risks. A scholar of literature who does not know the language in which a poem has been created, would not venture to submit the work to a closer analysis. However, cultural transfer is a much broader phenomenon and it also includes instances of some Western writers inspired by translations from Oriental languages. For example, Goethe did not know Persian and García Lorca did not know Arabic, but both created their respective "divans."

My example of a potential writer for the world literature canon is the poet Juhan Liiv (1864-1913) because of his philosophic-lyrical imagery and creative originality which can hardly be found in a European or Western poet adapted to a mainstream or fashionable poetic trend of his/her time. There is a brief mention of Liiv in the multivolume *Der Brockhaus Literatur*, but he does not appear in *Kleines literarisches Lexikon*. There is indeed little reason why Liiv's work should have been admitted to the canon of world literature. While Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* was originally published in Estonian with a parallel translation in German — thus having a convenient starting point to be accessed outside

the vernacular Estonian from the very beginning — Liiv who spent his life in elementary poverty and fell mentally ill in 1893, did not manage to publish in his lifetime any poetry book of his own selection. His canon in Estonia was established posthumously by younger writers, in the first place by Friedebert Tuglas who before World War II published two monographs on Liiv's life and work, as well as two major selections of Liiv's poetry. Tuglas considered Liiv's poetry a creative miracle that would be impossible to translate to other languages.

Although since Tuglas's work Liiv has been celebrated as one of Estonia's greatest poets of all times, efforts to translate his poetry have been rare in the past. In book form, translated poetic selections appeared before the end of the twentieth century only in Russian and in Esperanto, that is, in languages which obviously have their limits with regard to intercultural transfer. Liiv seemed to be destined to remain in the exclusive national canon, without any hope to be admitted as an author of world literature. During the period of his mental illness (schizophrenia), Liiv imagined himself to be the son of the Russian tsar Alexander II and the Estonian poetess Lydia Koidula and at the same time the heir of the Polish throne. He dreamed of going to Warsaw, to be welcomed by the Poles as their king, but in reality he never seems to have crossed the Estonian border. However, history remains open to surprises and unexpected turns. Despite his prophetic visions in poetry, Liiv could probably not have imagined that a hundred years after his passing his poems in English translation would be published in several prominent U.S. poetry magazines (e.g., *Poetry*, *Rowboat*) and thereafter would have repercussion in influential poetry blogs in internet. Liiv never had a typewriter and he left all his manuscripts to posterity in hand writing. A first small bilingual Estonian-English selection of his poetry was published in Estonia in 2007, while a substantially renewed and enlarged bilingual selection appeared in Canada in 2013, a century after the poet's death. It means that contrary to all gloomy predictions, Liiv's work is gradually emerging and being recognized in the wider world. If comparative literature and/or world literature scholarship manages to defend and strengthen its positions in the world's academe, one may be sure that Liiv is only one of a great number of writers whose work in the future would enrich and adorn the canon of world literatures.

In conclusion, I reiterate the need of overcoming -isms, schisms, and fragmentation in literary scholarship. Scholars of literature and culture should not ignore or reject what has been achieved in different parts of the world in an attempt of explicating and (re)interpreting the values contained in established canons of world literature. They must be prepared to add new works and authors to the canon of world literatures not only from traditional central cultures and the linguistic area represented by their "home languages," but also from the "periphery." The research of national literatures should move away from self-centeredness and become "comparativized." By doing so, there is hope to open discourse about all existing canons — active, passive, as well as potential — and keep them in a state of a permanent dynamics and renovation. I am certain that such an intra-dialogue of literary scholarship however tentative and far from its ideal state would result in enhancing conditions between "self" and "other," as well as between "centers" and "peripheries" in whatever parts of the world.

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Author's profile: Jüri Talvet teaches world literatures at the University of Tartu. His interests in scholarship include comparative poetics of Western literatures, Baroque poetics, Romanticism, twentieth-century novel and poetry, Spanish and Latin American literature, Estonian poetry, and intercultural studies. In addition to numerous articles, Talvet's recent book publications include *Juhan Liivi luule. Monograafia* (2012) (Juhan Liiv's Poetry: A Monograph). E-mail: <juri.talvet@ut.ee>